

## EVERYBODY WANTS TO KNOW ABOUT RAY ROMANO

CB was lucky to have caught RAY ROMANO after his hilarious Gala performance at The Just for Laughs Festival in 1998. It's obvious why Everybody Loves Raymond. True to his character, Ray is genuinely nice, helpful, humble, and as we all know... FUNNY. Admittedly unsure as to what he had to offer, Ray put his busy schedule on hold when he learned CB is a magazine geared toward helping other comics. Surely, his talent will enable Ray to continue his success, but if Kharma adds to it, Ray Romano can expect to hit the moon. Even with his now hectic life, this is one "star" who certainly hasn't forgotten his roots. As Ray puts it, "I'm glad I'm so busy, there's no time for it to all sink in."

### TELL US SOME BACKGROUND INFO... HOW DID YOU YOU STARTED?

How I got started? Wow, this is going to be a long one! I started at the Improv in New York, in '82. That was my first time ever on stage, then I gave it up... I went on stage about 3 times, then I quit for around two years. So '84 is my official start in standup at the Improv.

### WHY DID YOU QUIT?

Because I experienced what it was like to bomb. The first time I was on I did well, and the second time I was on I did well, and you get a false security, you think, oh man this is easy, and then I experienced what bombing was and it scared me for two years. Then in about '84, my official start in standup, I would go on late at night at the Improv and a little club in the village called Comedy U. It was on University Street in NY. It's not open anymore, but that's where I did most of my stage time.

### HOW DID YOU GET YOUR FIRST BREAK AS FAR AS GETTING PAID GIGS, THEN TELEVISION?

Well the paid gigs just came very gradual. Like the first t.v. spot. It was the MTV Half Hour Comedy Hour. Remember that? Mario Joyner was the host and... how did I get that? I think I just auditioned at The Comic Strip. I didn't have a manager, or an agent but I had been in the business about four years, maybe three years, whatever. That was my first t.v. spot, then I did the cable shows, and I slowly, about five or six years in, got my manager. I signed with Rory Rosegarten. He saw me at the K-Rock Comedy Contest. He was one of the judges, and he saw me one year, I made it to the finals but I lost. The next year I won, and he was one of the judges then too. He called me the day after that, we had a meeting, one thing led to another and I've been with Rory Rosegarten ever since. That was in '89 I think. Then about two years later I did "The Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson. Rory Rosegarten knew the guy who was booking it, and had dealt with him. So when he came into New York he asked, "Who do you want me to see?" and Rory said you should see Ray Romano and Brian Regan, so he saw us all and, he didn't give it to me then, but then next time we were in L.A. for something else, we went up to him again at the Melrose Improv-- to this guy who was booking "The Tonight Show" (this is right when Johnny had announced his retirement, he was going to retire the following year so there was only like a year left). I went on at

the Melrose Improv and the next day he called us into his office and we got a date to do the show. November 15, 1991. That was a big part of my comedy career. I mean it wasn't like, you do "The Tonight Show" and become overnight great. I mean that only happened in the early 80's or late 70's. It was just something that you dream of doing. It was pretty neat.

### HOW DID YOU GET YOUR... show?

**YEAH!**

You just start the questions and I'll finish them!  
**O.K! How...**

...did you get your pants on this morning?! The show came about from Letterman. I had done Leno, I had done all the "HBO Young Comedians" and I had done everything, except Letterman. Nobody was making any offers for development deals or anything and I wasn't thinking- I wasn't using stand-up to get a show but that's the way everything was going in the business. I mean, I thought it would be nice if somebody offered me something, but... Then I did Letterman for the first time. I guess it's three and a half years ago now when I did my first set on Letterman. I had a pretty good set and the next week they called me and said they wanted to sign me to a deal, a development deal. Robert Burnett. Robert Burnett the Producer called me at my house on a Saturday afternoon and said, "We just want to say that we're interested so if anyone talks to you, you should speak to us first." I wanted to say, 'nobody is talking to me, you could have me!' We signed with them a couple of months later. We decided to develop a show and then HBO got involved, this is when Bob Morgan was still with "The Tonight Show". He was good friends with Stu Smiley from HBO and they were kinda partners, so he brought HBO in. So my show is now produced by HBO and Worldwide Pants. Then, they pitched me to CBS, and they said, "Fine, find a writer and we'll talk." We interviewed writers and we found our show a writer, and a show runner. We interviewed, and I met with about eleven different show runners. I found a guy I liked, we pitched an idea to CBS, they said, "Go ahead write a script", we wrote a script, then they have to... there are so many steps where it could have stopped. First, they read the script and they decide whether to make a pilot. Everything was; we didn't know, every step we didn't know, it could have ended right there. There was no sure thing, it was all 'we'll have to wait', we were waiting by the phone. They read the script and they said, "O.k. make a pilot." When they commit to making a pilot that's like five hundred thousand, whatever they are committing to, and they said, "Let's make a pilot." We made a pilot and waited again to see if it gets picked up and then it got picked up. It got picked up for thirteen episodes and then after thirteen, they picked it up for four more then they picked it up for five more, they would never commit to it. The critics were very good though, that's what kept us on the air the first year. We weren't doing good in the ratings, but the critics liked us. Then they moved us to Monday nights and we developed a little bit of a following and here we are right here.

*continued*